

MY NEW EYES

Hector Chevigny

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A group of blind students on the Seeing Eye grounds in Morristown, N. J., learn how to use their newly acquired dogs as guides

My New Eyes

HECTOR CHEVIGNY

How Seeing Eye, Inc., trained the author, a professional writer who had suddenly become blind, to use the sight of an intelligent dog.

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I MET my eyes some weeks ago. We were formally introduced in the recreation room of the famous Seeing Eye establishment at Morristown, N. J., to which I had just come for the month of training in preparation for the use of a guide dog. The introduction on the part of my eyes was acknowledged by the kind of snort made only by a friendly, male boxer and the touch of a very cold and very broad nose. When told that his name was "Wizard," I said, not too cleverly, "I hope it fits."

Four months before, my vision had been as good as anyone's. Then suddenly my retinas, the plates in the camera of my eyes, began to detach from their proper position. The surgeons did their best, but soon I was totally and permanently blind.

I was more fortunate than most in my predicament; for fifteen years I had been a writer, a profession that does not de-

pend absolutely on the possession of vision. I had lost neither my skill nor my knowledge. A good secretary could furnish the connection between these and the page. There remained the problem of mobility. The greatest burden of the blind is very often the complete dependence for movement upon the good will of others.

I, therefore, needed no urging to consider getting a guide dog. But it still seemed incredible that anyone would dare try crossing, say Lexington Avenue in New York City, at high noon with only a small animal to guide him.

I was familiar enough with the story of Seeing Eye in its beginnings, hardly two decades ago, at Fortunate Fields, the estate of Mrs. Dorothy Eustis in Switzerland, and in its sixteen years of existence in the United States. I was willing to grant that a dog was the nearest substitute for sight, but I reserved judgment until

the day my dog and I would try that first crossing of Lexington Avenue.

Now, although Wizard has his off days when he would rather take a taxi or a bus than walk in the rain, and does not hesitate to let me know by some plain balking, as a usual thing he takes me wherever I want to go. I walk from my home to Fifth Avenue, crossing Lexington, Park, and Madison Avenues with as much safety as I ever did and twice as frequently. The fact that Wizard needs the exercise makes me get out more often than I used to. Special legislation in New York State permits us to go together on all transportation systems. The public is stubbornly of the opinion that I am going to get killed in the revolving doors and I always have to explain to someone that I am not.

We go to restaurants for lunch or dinner. When I am seated, Wizard obediently downs at my feet and stays

there. Occasional head waiters are outraged at the very thought of a dog. At such times Wizard and I do not bother to explain that Seeing Eye has taken special pains to show us how to behave at table; we do not argue because other restaurants are glad to have us.

We attract a great deal of attention, but Wizard and I are a couple of hams and we love it. He weighs a little over sixty pounds, has a sort of brindle coat—they tell me—and a curiously black, wrinkled face. He has a habit of keeping his tongue lolled out and exposing his teeth in a way that quickly clears the path for us. His ferocious appearance belies his character, though. I have never heard him bark. He is susceptible to moods, and I have to be bright and cheerful with him or he gets worried about me. When *he* isn't cheerful I worry about *him*, so we are well matched.

They have an apt phrase at Seeing Eye: the dog does not belong to you, you belong to the dog. The dogs are not "trained" to work for the blind, they are persuaded. And all their professional lives as guide dogs thereafter, they have to be kept persuaded.

The Training Period

Snow lay on the ground the February day I enrolled with fifteen other blind from all parts of the United States. We were divided into two groups of eight, each with its instructor.

I was taken upstairs to the comfortable room I would share with another, told where to hang my clothes, where to find the bathroom, recreation room and the way to the dining hall. After that I was expected to find things for myself. If you lose a sock or a shoe you can ask someone to help you find it, but you must make your own search first. You butter your own bread, cut your own meat; if you complain that you have never done these things before, you are told it's about time you started.

No one can give a man independence; he must find it himself. This is part of the philosophy of Seeing Eye. Every important member of the staff has spent at least one month living the life of a blind person, his vision cut off by a close-fitting black mask, until he too knows what it is to be without sight. Sympathy is not excluded, but pity is.

We found this atmosphere curiously refreshing. The staff treated us as complete equals and it was a welcome relief after the condolences of relatives and friends. Visitors could see us for only two hours on Saturdays and Sundays; the inept touch of the public, which so often destroys self-confidence, has to be excluded. For Seeing Eye trains not only dogs, but people.

The sum total of bad bodily habits

brought by individuals to Seeing Eye is often forbiddingly large. They are taught not merely how to walk in confidence with the dog, but to walk freely, rapidly and with grace and strength. The student's voice sometimes needs training, for it is the medium of communication between dog and master; habitual gruffness, too much variation of mood expressed in tone, must be corrected.

My first day as a student I spent attending lectures by the chief instructor, William Debetaz, who is the living link with the original work in Switzerland. The next day I met Wizard, and my seven classmates were assigned their own dogs. Four were German shepherds, two were Labrador retrievers, and I had one of two boxers.

We spent two days getting acquainted with our dogs. Our reactions varied with our temperaments and experience. Four of the students had never had dogs before and were unsure of themselves. The rest of us petted and praised our dogs extravagantly. Each man was sure he had the pick of the class.

Wizard and the other seven dogs had just gone through some three months' training with our instructor. He had learned to walk in the light harness with the U-shaped handle, pause at curbs, stop for passing automobiles, and pay no attention to lamp posts. He had also conceived a passionate adoration for the instructor.

On the fourth day when we first tried walking with our dogs in harness on the streets of Morristown, Wizard trotted beside me amiably, responding to the ten words used in command. But it soon became apparent that he was cooperating because ordered to do so by the instructor. It now dawned on me that I had to show this dog I was the more desirable master.

The instructor assured me that there would come a definite day when Wizard

would show himself my dog. The instructor would recognize that moment because Wizard would no longer be doing by rote what he had been trained to do, but would be actively on guard for my safety, leading me around puddles, keeping me from hitting lamp posts and mail boxes. This rapport between student and dog usually takes about three weeks. Sometimes it never takes place, and then the student has failed.

Life was strenuous at Seeing Eye. We got up at 5:45 to take the dogs outdoors for curbing. The hearty breakfast served at seven was welcome. By eight we were on the streets practicing, our instructor taking us in pairs with our dogs. At lunch we always took our dogs to table with us as part of their training. They were supposed to lie perfectly still on command. But with sixteen dogs in one dining hall, sudden eruptions under the table were excitingly frequent. At one, we were back on the streets. Our day ended with the last visit of the dogs outdoors at eight.

With all those dogs tethered to our beds, things happened at night too. A couple of them had to be cured of barking every time anyone moved. The instructor got even less sleep than we did. There was always some student waking him with the news that the bed chain had broken and his dog was nowhere to be found, his dog was on the bed and would not let him get back into it, or another job of housebreaking had to be done.

A Dog's Intelligence

After spending a month at Seeing Eye, I can never subscribe to the belief that dogs do not think. If thought means the power to form judgments, harbor opinions, and retain memories, certain dogs do have it. Dogs can become aware of responsibility and reason with this awareness as a basis.

Pure blood, incidentally, is not one of Seeing Eye's norms; many a dog with a questionable grandfather makes the grade. Intelligence ranks high among the specifications. But, curiously, some dogs have altogether too much intelligence for Seeing Eye work. After a week or two training with the instructor, such a dog sometimes decides that this is too much like work and spends more time devising ways of getting out of his contract than of fulfilling it.

It has often been asked if Seeing Eye dogs actually realize their masters cannot see. The staff well knows that the dogs recognize the difference between the blind and the visioned. As they lie sprawled in the recreation room or dining hall, they do not change position when a sighted person steps close to them. But let a blind person approach and they pull



A guide dog like the author's

their paws to safety or silently find another position.

When Wizard made the discovery that I could not see, his attitude at first changed from indifference to something worse. That meant he could play all kinds of tricks on me. He observed that I did not know when I was at the end of a street until I touched the curb. If he just succeeded in turning me ever so neatly at a corner before taking me to the curb, he could deflect me to the warmth of the bus station or toward the automobile in which we had come from the school, thus saving himself an hour's practice with me.

Wizard's tricks marked a crucial point in my own training. My classmates began having the same trouble, and we were disappointed and gloomy. The instructor knew what was happening, however. The time had come to administer discipline. Until then, we had not been allowed to use more than a mild, verbal reproof, although we were expected to give loud and extravagant praise when the dog did his job correctly. Now we were taught to give our words authority, by an expert tug on the leash. This was not punishment. Dogs are never punished; they are corrected. The correction must come instantly upon the realization by the master that the dog is doing something wrong; and when the dog resumes doing things the correct way, the praise must be unmistakable.

What makes the dog finally decide to assume full responsibility seems to be beyond human understanding. He will go to sleep under his master's bed at Seeing Eye one night without it and the next morning awoken with it. From that point on the master is safe. He can cross any street or proceed up the most crowded sidewalk with assurance. His period of training, except for a few technical pointers, is over. He is ready to go home.

Independence Regained

Graduation at Seeing Eye is as casual as was matriculation. There are no diplomas. We do go to the executive offices to arrange to pay our bill, a last manifestation of Seeing Eye's philosophy of sympathy without pity. Our dogs might as well be given to us for nothing, the discrepancy is so great between what they have cost and what we will pay. The cost is six or seven times what we will be charged. But we are not told that.

We are told the price to us: \$150. The men who come for their second or third dogs pay \$50. The cost to servicemen is \$1. For persons for whom the price is hard to come by, credit is extended for months or even years.

As Seeing Eye, Inc., is a non-profit philanthropic agency, organized on a

membership basis, the difference between the cost of its services and the tuition it charges is made up almost entirely through memberships and contributions. Though there is always a short waiting list, the agency manages to keep pace with the demands of blind men and women from every part of the country who are eligible for Seeing Eye dogs. Eligibility in this instance means coming between the ages of seventeen and fifty-five, with a few exceptions, and having an instinctive liking for dogs.

Wizard is now my dog, or rather I am Wizard's man, but I cannot say I

am any hero to him. He insists upon regular mealtimes and when I stay over-long on visits, he does not hesitate to let me know that we should be going. When my temper flares, he just sits on his broad bottom until it blows over. For some unfathomable reason he loves bars and is not helping my reputation by occasionally turning into one without an order from me.

People still try to help us cross the street and we thank them politely. But I do not need their help any more. For Wizard has given me back the thing I value most—my independence.

Undergraduate Training

ANNE FENLASON

The chairman of the AASSW's committee on pre-professional training for social work, and faculty member of the University of Minnesota, tells of the committee's recommendations for undergraduate training.

WITH wartime pressures necessity has again become the mother of changes of permanent value. Forced to a reexamination of its program and policies by the continued pressure for trained personnel, the American Association of Schools of Social Work recently approved recommendations for fundamental changes in its plans of education for social work.

These recommendations, born of the crises of the depression and the war, are cumulative results rather than cataclysmic ones.

There has never been a surplus of social workers even before the depression and the war. To the contrary, there has always been a shortage of workers with full professional equipment. This fact was obscured when the shortage was in terms of hundreds, when applicants came unsought to agencies, and when students enrolled in schools of social work with little or no inducement.

The primary and continuing obligation of schools of social work is to provide an education which will enable its graduates to render competent social service. However, there now is the grave obligation of considering the extent to which they can aid in meeting the shortage of workers. They must anticipate in their planning an accelerated demand for trained workers which will come as an aftermath of the war when the demobilization of the armed forces, the conversion of war-born industries to peacetime production, the flow of students back to colleges and universities, and other reversals of present trends must be met with a minimum of social and personal disorganization. The challenge to the schools of social work is to meet these situations and still provide

the kind of education which professional competence demands.

The failure thus far of the AASSW member schools to recruit enough students to meet existing demands, and the lowered standards in merit system and civil service, are factors in the increase in the number of schools outside of the membership of the association offering training on graduate and undergraduate levels.

In a recent study, Esther Lucile Brown has found that twenty-two such colleges and universities are offering curricula roughly comparable to that of the member schools; fourteen additional colleges and universities offer sequences in social work, mostly at an undergraduate level; at least eighteen institutions offer three or four undergraduate courses in social work, and at least ninety-four colleges or universities offer one or more undergraduate courses.

A Growing Trend

This analysis, which makes no pretense of being comprehensive or completely accurate, is important in that it calls our attention forcibly to what is a rapidly growing trend rather than a status. Another indication of the trend has been an organized movement of southwestern colleges to form a professional association of colleges interested in offering full training for social work on an undergraduate basis. More recently, a group of educators from the social science faculties of state supported institutions has formed the "National Association of Schools of Social Administration." The schools represented in this organization are primarily interested in preparation for social work on an undergraduate basis.

The idea of undergraduate education is not new. Up to 1937, it was a recognized plan of professional education for social work. In that year, however, a change was made which limited professional education to the graduate years. But even then it was not assumed that the forty-two graduate schools of social work could ever either recruit or provide trained personnel in sufficient numbers to staff agencies adequately.

It cannot be emphasized too strongly that there is no substitute for a qualified personnel, which the graduates from schools of social work represent. Nevertheless, the failure to recruit sufficient students for such training results in disillusionment to agencies and communities which have reached a point of demanding competent workers. Every time a rural community or an urban agency is forced to employ a worker with less equipment than the job demands, professional and educational standards are impaired. The impact on the merit system of having to appoint provisional and unqualified workers jeopardizes the entire merit plan. Once standards are lowered, they are difficult to retrieve.

Pre-professional Preparation

Few people would dispute the value of undergraduate social work courses in institutions where the graduate social work curriculum is rooted in pre-professional preparation based on an interdepartmental sequence taught by competent instructors, including some of the social work staff. In such institutions the undergraduate courses are in the form of sequences, planned and sponsored by the school of social work, which utilizes other departments as well as its own to the focus of later professional work.

Quite a different situation is reflected in the attempt of a social science faculty in a small college with an overworked academic staff trying to take on the additional task of vocational training. And again, a very different aspect is presented by a strong graduate school of social work functioning relatively independently of social science faculties and making little functional use of the university with which it is affiliated. Cooperation between the faculties of graduate schools of social work and those of the social science departments of arts colleges, in an effort to formulate the best possible undergraduate program, is important to professional education.

This implies that undergraduate sequences would be planned as the first stage in social work education; that they would be considered as pre-professional; that their curricula would be drawn from many departments of the college or university, including some offerings by the social work staff, to form an undergradu-

ate course of study focused toward social work. Such a course might make the arts college graduate more useful in immediate employment in a social work agency without detracting from its value as the foundation of the graduate curriculum in social work.

Changed Concepts

The changes recommended at the annual meeting of the American Association of Schools of Social Work last January by its committee on pre-professional education for social work related both to concepts of professional training and to curriculum content. The committee's report, which was accepted by the association as a whole, embodied the fundamental concept that education for social work should represent a planned progression from the undergraduate years through the two graduate years.

In line with this concept, the committee recognized three levels of training for social work: the undergraduate level which is both pre-professional and sub-professional; the first-year graduate level which represents a year of generic preparation for social work; the second-year graduate level which represents the termination of full professional training and includes concentration in some specialized field of social work.

Eventually it should be possible to accord proper recognition at the different levels, so that it will be clear to students and social agencies that they represent different stages of professional development. This suggestion was presented by the committee in the form of a resolution and approved at the meeting. It poses a professional as well as an educational problem and will have to be worked out jointly by professional organizations and the educational associations. It must also await job analyses in the various fields of social work.

According to the committee's recommendations, the undergraduate curriculum, as the initial phase in education for social work, must be designed to serve any of three purposes:

1. To provide a reservoir of potentially able students who will eventually enroll in the graduate courses either as a progression from their undergraduate curriculum or as students returning from practice later for professional training.
2. To recruit more professional personnel to be immediately useful to a social work agency or social work program.
3. To recruit to social work persons unable to go on into graduate training for various personal reasons, but who have capacity for further development in an in-service training program.

The committee deliberately avoided making specific recommendations as to undergraduate content, fearing that pre-

ture crystallization would prevent, rather than further, the sound evolution of an integrated program. What recommendations were made as to content were based upon the general principle that any course offered on an undergraduate level would, of necessity, differ from the same subject offered as a graduate course. For example, a differential characteristic of a methods course at the graduate level would be a specific application to a phase of social welfare. In most instances it would be accompanied by and integrated with field practice. In contrast, the undergraduate course would be extensive and general.

The undergraduate courses would be drawn from many departments of the college or university to form a planned sequence of study focused toward social work. On the other hand, there would be reserved for graduate work, courses that are truly graduate in character — whether concerned with the technicalities of social work or with related fields.

Curriculum Content

As a suggestion for curriculum building, the committee advised that content at the different levels be related to the vocational goal rather than molded in conformity to custom. There probably is no undergraduate course which could not be developed into a graduate one by revision of content and possibly by different teaching methods. However, many courses now carried on the graduate level are either now undergraduate in character or warrant adaptation to the initial level.

Undergraduate offerings fall naturally into three groups:

1. *Social science courses*, selected from various departments for the background knowledge they afford the social worker.

The professional worker in any field needs to understand its background — the world in which it has developed and in which it is being carried on. In social work, courses in economics, political science, sociology, psychology, anthropology, and history may be combined in various ways to present this picture. These and similar courses are historical and informational in character. Their meaning is unrelated to the practice of social work, even though they may bring to practice a deeper and different significance.

2. *Courses focused more directly to the practice of social work.*

These are mainly discussion courses for the purpose of familiarizing the student with the range and scope of problems encountered in social work practice and of affording a descriptive analysis of the means of meeting them. "The Field of Social Work" is a topic properly in this category, as are courses in surveying the community and social welfare, child wel-

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